

Labour Market, Qualifications and Claimant Headline Figures:

Released 21st April 2026

Regional Labour Market¹ –

Please note: Estimates from January to March 2025 include the full effect of recent improvements in Labour Force Survey (LFS) data collection and sampling methods introduced from January 2024; however, estimates may be subject to the effect of further ongoing improvements. An increased amount of volatility will remain in the estimates from mid-year 2023 and throughout 2024, so ONS would advise caution when interpreting change involving those periods. ONS recommend using the LFS estimates as part of our suite of labour market indicators, alongside Workforce Jobs, Claimant Count and Pay As You Earn Real Time Information (PAYE RTI) estimates. LFS estimates are weighted to 2022 mid-year population estimates for periods from January to March 2019; headline UK seasonally adjusted series before this have been modelled, but other series have a discontinuity at this point.

- For the three months ending February 2026, the West Midlands Region employment rate (aged 16 – 64 years) was 73.4%. Since the three months ending November 2025, the employment rate decreased by 0.3 percentage points (pp). When compared to the same period in the previous year, the employment rate decreased by 0.2pp. The UK employment rate was 75.0%, a 0.1pp decrease when compared to the previous quarter but unchanged when compared to the previous year. The highest employment rate within the UK for the three months ending February 2026 was in the South East with 78.6% and the lowest in Northern Ireland with 71.2%, the West Midlands ranked fifth lowest.
- For the three months ending February 2026, the West Midlands Region unemployment rate (aged 16 years and over) was 5.5%, which has decreased by 0.3pp since the previous quarter but was 1.1pp higher when compared to the previous year. The UK unemployment rate was 4.9%, a 0.2pp decrease from the previous quarter but a 0.5pp increase when compared to the previous year. The highest unemployment rate in the UK for the three months ending February 2026 was in London with 7.4% and the lowest in Northern Ireland with 2.2%, the West Midlands ranked joint third highest (with Yorkshire and the Humber and the East Midlands).
- For the three months ending February 2026, the West Midlands Region economic inactivity rate (aged 16 – 64 years) was 22.1%, an increase of 0.7pp from the previous quarter but a decrease of 0.7pp when compared to the previous year. The UK economic inactivity rate was 21.0%, an increase of 0.2pp from the previous quarter but a 0.4pp decrease from the previous year. The highest economic inactivity rate in the UK for the three months ending February 2026 was Northern Ireland with 27.2% with the lowest in the South East with 18.1%, the West Midlands ranked sixth lowest.
- For payrolled employees², when comparing March 2026 with the same period last year, the UK overall decreased by 0.2% and regional changes ranged from a 1.1% increase in Northern Ireland (the only area to increase) to a 0.6% decrease in London. The West Midlands decreased by 0.2%.

Annual Population Survey – Labour Market: 2025³

- Overall, for the WMCA area, the economic activity rate was 74.9% in 2025, an increase of 0.6 percentage points (pp) since 2024. The England economic activity rate was 79.5% and increased at a faster rate of 0.8pp. When compared to 2020, the WMCA increased by 0.1pp which matched the England increase.
- In 2025, the WMCA was the third lowest Combined Authority for economic activity. West of England Combined Authority was the highest at 83.2% down to Tees Valley Combined Authority at 74.1%.

¹ Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS), Labour market in the regions of the UK: April 2026

² Payrolled employee figures should be treated as provisional estimates and are likely to be revised when more data is received next month.

³ Office for National Statistics (ONS), Annual Population Survey (APS), released April 2026.

- The WMCA area employment rate was 69.2% in 2025, this was a decrease of 0.3pp since 2024. While England's employment rate increased by 0.2pp to 75.8%. When compared to 2020, the WMCA was 0.5pp lower compared to an increase of 0.2pp England-wide.
- In 2025, the WMCA was the lowest Combined Authority for employment rate. Devon & Torbay Combined Authority was the highest at 80.3% down to the second lowest which was Tees Valley Combined Authority at 69.9%.
- Since 2024, the WMCA area unemployment rate increased by 1.1pp to 7.6% in 2025. England's unemployment rate increased by 0.6pp to 4.6% in 2025. When compared to 2020, the WMCA rate increased by 0.7pp compared to a 0.2pp decrease England-wide.
- In 2025, the WMCA was the highest Combined Authority for unemployment. York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority was the lowest at 1.7% up to the second highest which was West Yorkshire Combined Authority at 5.7%.
- The WMCA area economic inactivity rate was 25.1% in 2025, a decrease of 0.6pp since 2024. England's economic inactivity rate decreased by 0.8pp to 20.5%. When compared to 2020, both the WMCA area and England were 0.1pp lower.
- In 2025, the WMCA was third highest Combined Authority for economic inactivity. West of England Combined Authority was the lowest at 16.8% up to the highest which was the Tees Valley Combined Authority at 25.9%.

Annual Population Survey – Qualifications: 2025⁴

- For the WMCA area, 42.8% (778,900) of the working age population had RQF4+ qualifications in 2025, an increase of 2.5% (+18,800) since 2024. While for England, 48.0% were qualified to RQF4+ levels, an annual increase of 3.4%.
- In 2025, the WMCA was in the middle of all Combined Authorities for those qualified to RQF4+ levels. West of England Combined Authority was the highest at 54.8% down to Greater Lincolnshire Combined Authority at 34.2%.
- For the WMCA area, 9.5% (172,100) of the working age population had no qualifications in 2025, a decrease of 10.8% (-20,900) since 2024. While for England, 6.1% had no qualifications, an annual decrease of 6.7%.
- In 2025, the WMCA was the second highest Combined Authority for no qualifications. North East Combined Authority was the highest at 10.2% down to West of England Combined Authority at 3.3%.
- For the WMCA area, 19.5% (354,900) of the working age population had RQF3 qualifications in 2025, a decrease of 1.3% (-4,700) since 2024. While for England, 20.6% were qualified to RQF3 levels, an annual increase of 1.4%.
- In 2025, the WMCA was the second lowest Combined Authority for those qualified to RQF3 levels. Hull & East Yorkshire Combined Authority was the highest at 26.3% down to the lowest which was Greater Manchester Combined Authority at 19.0%.
- For the WMCA area, 19.5% (354,200) of the working age population had RQF2 qualifications in 2025, a decrease of 3.1% (-11,400) since 2024. While for England, 18.2% were qualified to RQF2 levels, an annual decrease of 4.2%.
- In 2025, the WMCA was the third lowest Combined Authority for those qualified to RQF2 levels. Greater Lincolnshire Combined Authority was the highest at 24.6% down to the West of England Combined Authority at 15.3%.
- For the WMCA area, 3.0% (55,400) of the working age population had RQF1 qualifications in 2025, an increase of 20.4% (+9,400) since 2024. While for England, 2.4% were qualified to RQF1 levels, an annual decrease of 4.6%.
- In 2025, the WMCA was joint fifth highest Combined Authority (with South Yorkshire and East Midlands) for those qualified to RQF1 levels. Greater Lincolnshire Combined Authority was the highest at 4.1% down to York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority at 1.7%.

⁴ ONS, APS, released April 2026. A five year comparison is not available due to a change in methodology.

- For the WMCA area, 5.7% (103,400) of the working age population had other qualifications in 2025, an increase of 13.4% (+12,200) since 2024. While for England, 4.5% had other qualifications, an annual increase of 3.9%.
- In 2025, the WMCA was the highest Combined Authority for those with other qualifications. Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority was the second highest at 5.6% down to Devon & Torbay and York & North Yorkshire Combined Authorities both at 2.6%.

Claimant Count⁵

All Claimants Summary

Revised Estimates

- New figures show that there were 140,975 (revised down from 143,440 claimants) in the WMCA area in February 2026. Since January 2026, there has been an increase of 2.5% (+3,450) claimants in the WMCA area – these figures have been revised from an increase of 4.3% (+5,915). For England over this period, there has been an increase of 3.0%, revised from an increase of 4.9%.
- When compared to February 2025, claimants have now decreased by 4.4% (-6,425) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from a decrease of 2.7% (-3,960). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 3.6%, revised from a decrease of 1.8%.
- When compared to February 2021, claimants have decreased by 19.7% (-34,490) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from a decrease of 18.3% (-32,025). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 35.6%, revised from a decrease of 34.4%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64 years old was 7.3% in February 2026 (revised from 7.4%). For England, the proportion was 4.0% (revised from 4.1%).
- Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA still had the highest rates, West Yorkshire was second highest at 4.9% (revised from 5.0%) down to 2.0% for York & North Yorkshire (revised from 2.1%).

Provisional Estimates

- There were 144,120 claimants in the WMCA area in March 2026. Since February 2026, there has been an increase of 2.2% (+3,145) claimants in the WMCA area, while England increased by 2.1%. When compared to March 2025 claimants have decreased by 2.5% (-3,715) in the WMCA area, with England decreasing by 1.2%. When compared to March 2021, claimants have decreased by 18.0% (-31,650) in the WMCA area, with England decreasing by 34.1%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16-64 years old was 7.5% compared to 4.1% for England in March 2026. Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA had the highest rates, West Yorkshire was second highest at 5.0% down to 2.1% for York & North Yorkshire.

⁵ Source: ONS/DWP, Claimant Count, April 2026. This experimental series counts the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance plus those who claim Universal Credit and are required to seek work and be available for work and replaces the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance as the headline indicator of the number of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed. Please note, when new data is released, the previous month is also revised.

Youth Claimant (Aged 18-24) Summary

Revised Estimates

- New figures show that there were 29,205 (revised down from 29,620) youth claimants in the WMCA area in February 2026. Since January 2026, this has now increased by 1.9% (+540) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from an increase of 3.3% (+955). For England over this period, there has been an increase of 2.7%, revised from an increase of 4.3%.
- When compared to February 2025, youth claimants have now increased by 8.3% (+2,245) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from an increase of 9.9% (+2,660). For England over this period, there has been an increase of 7.7%, revised from an increase of 9.4%.
- When compared to February 2021, youth claimants have decreased by 15.5% (-5,340) in the WMCA area - these figures have been revised from a decrease of 14.3% (-4,925). For England over this period, there has been a decrease of 33.8%, revised from a decrease of 32.8%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 18-24 years old was 9.5% (revised from 9.6%) in February 2026. For England, the proportion was 5.8% (revised from 5.9%).
- Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA still had the highest rates, Tees Valley was second highest at 7.7% (revised from 7.9%) down to 2.8% for York & North Yorkshire (unchanged).

Provisional Estimates

- There were 29,850 youth claimants in the WMCA area in March 2026. Since February 2026, there has been an increase of 2.2% (+645) youth claimants in the WMCA area, England-wide youth claimants increased by 2.7%. When compared to March 2025, youth claimants have increased by 9.1% (+2,490) in the WMCA area, matching the England growth rate. When compared to March 2021, youth claimants have decreased by 14.5% (-5,055) in the WMCA area, with England decreasing by 32.4%.
- Overall, for the WMCA the number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 18-24 years old was 9.7% compared to 6.0% for England in March 2026. Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA had the highest rates, Tees Valley was the second highest at 7.9% down to 2.9% for York & North Yorkshire.

People on Universal Credit⁶ – WMCA

Searching for Work

Not working, or with very low earnings. Claimant is required to take action to secure work - or more / better paid work. The Work Coach supports them to plan their work search and preparation activity. Typical examples of people in this regime include jobseekers and gainfully self-employed in start-up period. Claimants are only in this regime if they do not fit into one of the other regimes.

- Revised estimates show that in the WMCA area, there were 137,169 people on Universal Credit – searching for work in February 2026. A monthly increase of 2.5% (+3,329), nationally there was an increase of 2.9%.
- Compared to February 2025, the WMCA area decreased by 4.5% (-6,410) while for England there was a decrease of 4.1%.
- Compared to February 2021, the WMCA decreased by 11.7% (-18,250) while for England there was a decrease of 31.4%.

⁶ Source: DWP, Universal Credit statistics, April 2026. Please note, when new data is released, the previous month is also revised.

- Provisional estimates show for March 2026, there were 140,330 people on Universal Credit – searching for work in the WMCA area.
- Revised estimates show that in the WMCA area, there were 28,965 people aged 18-24 on Universal Credit – searching for work in February 2026. A monthly increase of 1.8% (+509) for the WMCA compared to an increase of 2.5% for England.
- Compared to February 2025, the WMCA area increased by 8.4% (+2,239) while for England there was an increase of 7.6%.
- Compared to February 2021, the WMCA decreased by 14.2% (-4,793) while for England there was a decrease of 33.0%.
- Provisional estimates show for March 2026, there were 29,617 people aged 18-24 on Universal Credit – searching for work in the WMCA area.

Working – With Requirements

In work but could earn more, or not working but has a partner with low earnings.

- Revised estimates show that in the WMCA area, there were 50,270 people on Universal Credit – working with requirements in February 2026. A monthly decrease of 2.2% (-1,124), England decreased by 0.6%.
- Compared to February 2025, the WMCA area decreased by 6.4% (-3,436) while for England there was a decrease of 4.5%.
- Compared to February 2021, the WMCA decreased by 9.7% (-5,382) while for England there was a decrease of 9.6%.
- Provisional estimates show for March 2026, there were 50,088 people on Universal Credit – working with requirements in the WMCA area.
- Revised estimates show that in the WMCA area, there were 2,553 people aged 18-24 on Universal Credit – working with requirements in February 2026. A monthly decrease of 10.2% (-289) for the WMCA compared to a decrease of 4.1% for England.
- Compared to February 2025, the WMCA area increased by 6.6% (+159) while for England there was an increase of 5.0%.
- Compared to February 2021, the WMCA decreased by 65.4% (-4,834) while for England there was a decrease of 61.8%.
- Provisional estimates show for March 2026, there were 2,516 people aged 18-24 on Universal Credit – working with requirements the WMCA area.

No Work Requirements

Not expected to work at present. Health or caring responsibility prevents claimant from working or preparing for work. Examples of people in this regime include those in full time education, over state pension age, have a child under 1 years old and those with no prospect to work.

- Revised estimates show that in the WMCA area, there were 242,863 people on Universal Credit – no work requirements in February 2026. A monthly increase of 0.8% (+1,863), England increased by 0.7%.
- Compared to February 2025, the WMCA area increased by 28.9% (+54,450) while for England there was an increase of 30.7%.
- Compared to February 2021, the WMCA increased by 274.6% (+178,038) while for England there was an increase of 272.6%.
- Provisional estimates show for March 2026, there were 244,456 people on Universal Credit – no work requirements in the WMCA area.

- Revised estimates show that in the WMCA area, there were 17,230 people aged 18-24 on Universal Credit – no work requirements in February 2026. A monthly increase of 0.8% (+140) for the WMCA compared to an increase of 0.9% for England.
- Compared to February 2025, the WMCA area increased by 5.9% (+953) while for England there was an increase of 6.8%.
- Compared to February 2021, the WMCA increased by 72.9% (+7,267) while for England there was an increase of 81.6%.
- Provisional estimates show for March 2026, there were 17,421 people aged 18-24 on Universal Credit – no work requirements in the WMCA area.

Working – No Requirements

Individual or household earnings over the level at which conditionality applies. Required to inform DWP of changes of circumstances, particularly if at risk of decreasing earnings or job loss.

- Revised estimates show that in the WMCA area, there were 65,995 people on Universal Credit – working no requirements in February 2026. A monthly decrease of 5.5% (-3,811), England decreased by 4.0%.
- Compared to February 2025, the WMCA area decreased by 3.7% (-2,538) while for England there was a decrease of 5.9%.
- Compared to February 2021, the WMCA increased by 18.8% (+10,458) while for England there was an increase of 5.4%.
- Provisional estimates show for March 2026, there were 65,326 people on Universal Credit – working no requirements in the WMCA area.
- Revised estimates show that in the WMCA area, there were 2,918 people aged 18-24 on Universal Credit – working no requirements in February 2026. A monthly decrease of 13.8% (-469) for the WMCA compared to a decrease of 7.8% for England.
- Compared to February 2025, the WMCA area decreased by 10.2% (-332) while for England there was a decrease of 7.3%.
- Compared to February 2021, the WMCA decreased by 53.7% (-3,390) while for England there was a decrease of 58.1%.
- Provisional estimates show for March 2026, there were 2,931 people aged 18-24 on Universal Credit – working no requirements in the WMCA area.

Planning for Work

Expected to work in the future. Lone parent / lead carer of child aged 1-2. Claimant required to attend periodic interviews to plan for their return to work.

- Revised estimates show that in the WMCA area, there were 7,249 people on Universal Credit – planning for work in February 2026. A monthly decrease of 1.0% (-76), England decreased by 0.6%.
- Compared to February 2025, the WMCA area decreased by 8.3% (-657) while for England there was a decrease of 11.2%.
- Compared to February 2021, the WMCA decreased by 8.0% (-632) while for England there was a decrease of 23.4%.
- Provisional estimates show for March 2026, there were 7,264 people on Universal Credit – planning for work in the WMCA area.
- Revised estimates show that in the WMCA area, there were 1,347 people aged 18-24 on Universal Credit – planning for work in February 2026. A monthly decrease of 0.7% (-10) for the WMCA compared to a decrease of 0.1% for England.

- Compared to February 2025, the WMCA area decreased by 8.6% (-127) while for England there was a decrease of 8.8%.
- Compared to February 2021, the WMCA decreased by 32.2% (-639) while for England there was a decrease of 35.3%.
- Provisional estimates show for March 2026, there were 1,336 people aged 18-24 on Universal Credit – planning for work in the WMCA area.

Preparing for Work

Expected to start preparing for future even with limited capability for work at the present time or a child aged 3-4, the claimant is expected to take reasonable steps to prepare for work including Work Focused Interview.

- Revised estimates show that in the WMCA area, there were 28,692 people on Universal Credit – preparing for work in February 2026. A monthly decrease of 0.8% (-243), England decreased by 0.2%.
- Compared to February 2025, the WMCA area increased by 8.5% (+2,257) while for England there was an increase of 5.2%.
- Compared to February 2021, the WMCA increased by 84.5% (+13,140) while for England there was an increase of 61.9%.
- Provisional estimates show for March 2026, there were 28,621 people on Universal Credit – preparing for work in the WMCA area.

- Revised estimates show that in the WMCA area, there were 2,476 people aged 18-24 on Universal Credit – preparing for work in February 2026. A monthly increase of 1.1% (+26) for the WMCA compared to an increase of 0.9% for England.
- Compared to February 2025, the WMCA area decreased by 7.7% (-208) while for England there was a decrease of 6.2%.
- Compared to February 2021, the WMCA increased by 2.3% (+55) while for England there was an increase of 6.8%.
- Provisional estimates show for March 2026, there were 2,484 people aged 18-24 on Universal Credit – preparing for work in the WMCA area.